

Life in LAMORINDA

Lamorinda Interior Design—the Beauty Inside

By Andrea A. Firth



Leslie Kalish

Photo Andrea Firth

Transitional seems to be the “buzz” word when you ask area experts what the interior design trends in Lamorinda are today. “It’s not as heavy and incorporates clean lines,” explains Leslie Kalish, a resident of Moraga and owner of LMK Interiors based in Lafayette. She explains that the transitional approach to interior design mixes contemporary pieces with antiques fluidly, and it projects warmth and comfort not uncharacteristic of the many indulged but relaxed post-Baby Boom homeowners in the area. Karin Lechner, an interior designer based in Lafayette, concurs: “Design in this area today is not fussy or ornate. It’s simple. There may be antiques, but the style is simple.”

The house designs in Lamorinda span the spectrum from the traditional older-home styles of Orinda from the 1920’s and 30’s to the ranchers of the 1950’s and 60’s on to the Brandy Bunch split levels filled with oak from the 1970’s and 80’s followed by the contemporary styles of the 1990’s and sprinkled with a smattering of original farmhomes and funky modern houses. One might call the area architecturally challenged, but local interior designers choose a pragmatic approach.

“The biggest challenge in Lamorinda is lighting,” states Leslie Kalish. This is often a function of way the house is situated on the lot, low ceilings, the poor floor plans, and too many

soffits she explains. “Original rooms in Lamorinda homes were mostly rectangular—long and narrow,” notes Kalish. She often finds herself working in redesigned space. “Remodel is what we do,” she adds. “The great room trend—combining the kitchen, eating area, and family room into one open connected space—is continuing strong.”

“Lamorinda is a lot about updating,” notes Lechner. “Exterior remodels on the ranchers in the area have added Craftsman elements such as columns by the front door and detailing in the trim to great effect,” she adds, “But these design elements do not have to be carried through to the interior of the home necessarily.”

“You always hope that a project has some strong architectural bones,” explains Alissa Lillie, a resident of Orinda with an interior design business based in Emeryville. “There is a lot of variety in home styles in Lamorinda and that makes it interesting.”

Lillie, whose clients are primarily based in San Francisco, is in the process of expanding into the Lamorinda area. “From what I see, people in Lamorinda want to have their hand in things when it comes to interior design,” she explains. Lillie anticipates that the interior design market will continue to become more user friendly, and that the show rooms will become more accessible to the public.

All of the designers describe a profusion of new materials to work with inside homes today. Leslie Kalish finds more clients incorporating metal surfaces into their designs and that some are using unique products such as zinc. Reclaimed wood is also a popular material for countertops and floors. And she identifies with the trend toward mixing surfaces. “Having more than one kind of material in a countertop works well. The more you mix—the calmer it gets,” she explains.

“People are also becoming ecologically conscious,” notes Lillie. Whether this increased eco-awareness has had an effect on Lamorinda homeowner choices with respect to home décor products is unclear.



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Karin Lechner finds that although green design is hot among interior design junkies, she does not find it significantly affects the decision-making process of her clients in Lamorinda. “Green designs tend to be pricier,” she explains.

Leslie Kalish does find clients asking for low- and no-VOC (volatile organic compounds) paints to be used in their remodeling projects, but their motivation often stems from the fact that a family member struggles with allergies versus environmental considerations.

All the Lamorinda interior

design experts stress the need for clients to retain their own personal style in whatever interior design changes they make. “A person’s home should look and feel like them. It should tell their story,” notes Lechner.

“I see myself as part of an educational and guiding process with the client helping them to make good decisions and understanding what works well together and why,” states Lillie.

“I like to see what people love,” says Kalish. “I stick with their style but bring them to new heights.”

Keeping Easter Fun for Everyone – Even Easter Pets

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The House Rabbit Society’s “Make Mine Chocolate” campaign promotes buying chocolate bunnies for children on Easter Photo Jennifer Wake

Protzen experienced this first-hand. “I raised chicks when I was in first grade and kept them until they started to crow,” she said. “We had to give them up because we were in the city.”

Yet each year people continue to purchase rabbits and chicks as Easter pets, and sadly many end up abused or neglected. Just a few weeks before Easter, there were already more than 6,000 rabbits listed for adoption on PetFinder.org. “Unless a parent is willing to take care of rabbits they end up at ARF, the House Rabbit Society, or at a shelter,” Protzen said.

Moraga resident Sophie Lucacher realized how difficult

it can be to raise rabbits after she agreed to bring two bunnies home. “Andrea, my youngest child, age 10, had been begging for a rabbit for years (literally),” she said. “My husband didn’t want it in the house. A friend of ours, Kim Winter, (who has many animals) had a nice outside cage. I thought it would be a good solution.”

Her friend’s rabbit just had a litter, so Lucacher decided to buy the outside rabbit pen and took home two bunnies. “They were adorable. Andrea and her older sister swore they would care for them,” Lucacher said.

Although they built a lightweight mesh enclosure around

the pen so they could wander outdoors, the rabbits escaped numerous times. “We ran after them with the whole neighborhood helping us,” Lucacher said. “Sometimes it was fun, but when it got late and cold and everybody else had left, my kids and I ended up running after these animals that are incredibly fast and agile.”

Additionally, Lucacher said getting the children to clean the cage daily was nearly impossible, and when she let the rabbits into the kitchen, “they ate the phone wire and would grind their teeth on anything.”

“People don’t like the smell of rabbits in their home,” Protzen said, “and they think they can just put a cage outside, but if it’s not built to withstand predators, the rabbits will be gone. Raccoons and coyotes prey on them.”

Chicken wire needs to be more than a ¼ inch thick and sunk into the ground to keep chicks and bunnies safe. “If you use regular chicken wire, the raccoons will grab them right through the wire,” Chan said. “They will actually eat the chickens through the wire.” Owls, hawks, and dogs also prey on the animals.

Twice, a neighborhood dog charged Chan’s chicken cage and killed all her chickens.

And there are other costs as well. According to the House Rabbit Society, veterinary bills for rabbits can be more expensive than for dogs. And Rabbits can live up to 10 years.

“Some people think you can just give them food and water and go away for Spring Break,” said Protzen, “but they need to be boarded if you leave on a trip. There are costs like nail clipping, and they can have behavioral issues if they are not sprayed. Male rabbits tend to spray in the same place to mark their territory, and they dig and chew.”

The House Rabbit Society, which rescues abandoned rabbits and finds permanent adoptive homes for them, puts a moratorium on all rabbit adoptions during the Easter holiday, and started a campaign called “Make Mine Chocolate,” to promote purchasing chocolate bunnies for children versus the actual animal.

“Rabbits are not passive and cuddly,” the Society stated on their Web site. “They are ground-loving creatures who feel frightened and insecure when held and restrained.”

Protzen does not want to give rabbits a bad reputation, however. “Rabbits are great pets, if you’re ready for a rabbit,” she said.

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